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Curios and Relics

Furniture

Table

Civil War Surrender Table

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Chicagoland

Chicago Tribune Wednesday, March 5, 1986

The price for a piece of history

By Rudolph Unger

It is most likely that farmer Wilmer McLean felt quite satisfied with himself on April 9, 1865. He sold a great deal of his parlor furniture at a very good price, without even placing an advertisement.

One piece of furniture recently sold again, this time for \$16,500 to a Chicago collector, who was neither the first, nor the last to recognize its historical significance.

Wilmer McLean was a farmer in Appomattox Station, Va., whose home also served as the courthouse for Appomattox County.

On a spring day in 1865, the Civil War ended in McLean's parlor when Gen. Robert E. Lee, seated at one table, signed a statement of surrender to Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, who was seated at another.

As Lee prepared to ride off from McLean's farmstead after the surrender, Grant stood on the stairs of the McLean home and raised his hat in salute to his defeated foe. Grant's men did the same.

Lee returned the salute and rode off.

Grant's men returned to McLean's parlor and bought it up piece by piece.

"They were very aware of the very momentous moment in history they had witnessed; they probably took away the entire room," said Civil War buff and antique dealer Daniel R. Weinberg of Chicago.

Maj. Gen. Edward O.C. Ord paid McLean \$40 for the table that Lee had used. Maj. Gen. Philip L. Sheridan paid \$20 for the table Grant had used, Weinberg said. Then Sheridan asked Maj. Gen. George A. Custer—the same Custer who later specialized in making "stands"—to haul

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Tribune photo by Chris Walker

Civil War buff Daniel R. Weinberg shows off his prized table, allegedly used during the surrender ceremonies in Appomattox Station, Va. On the table is a bust of Gen. Robert E. Lee and a copy of Lee's surrender orders to his troops.

History

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it away on horseback.

"I'm sure McLean was happy to sell them at that high price, and buy replacement pieces for \$7 or \$8," Weinberg said.

A third table in the room was purchased, for price unknown, by Capt. Thomas Welles, a member of Grant's staff. Welles gave the table to his father, Gideon, who was Navy secretary under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.

The small, wooden and wheeled,

triple-level table with a desk drawer in it was kept in the Welles homestead in Glastonburg, Conn., for 114 years until it was sold in 1979 to a private collector.

It was sold again on Feb. 22 at an auction in Connecticut to Weinberg, who, like the soldier 120 years ago, recognized the historical significance of the table and was willing to pay for it.

Weinberg doled out \$16,500 for a piece of history with a swayed back. It seems the Welles family kept their goldfish bowl atop the table.

"It was present at one of the most auspicious moments in American history and I thought

the price for which I got it was a bargain," said Weinberg, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, 18 E. Chestnut St.

Weinberg noted that the table at which Grant wrote out the terms of surrender for Lee is housed in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

The table at which Lee read and signed the surrender terms, a larger marble top piece, is the property of the Chicago Historical Society, he said.

Although it pained him to part with it, Weinberg already has surrendered his Appomattox table for an undisclosed profit to an unnamed collector, he said.



